

About the Big Sandy Energy Project



Project background

Caithness Big Sandy, LLC, proposes to construct the Big Sandy Project, a natural gas-fired generating facility, on private lands near Wikieup, Ariz. An energy development and operating company, Caithness has applied for an interconnection with the Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kilovolt (kV) Transmission Line, and to build portions of a natural gas supply pipeline, permanent access road and water pipeline system across land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (see enclosed map).

Based on Caithness' application, Western Area Power Administration and BLM have determined that they must prepare an environmental impact statement to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, and will be joint-lead agencies. The EIS will study the potential impacts to the human and natural environment from building and operating the Big Sandy Project. The EIS will include impacts associated with the gas-fired generation facility, electrical switchyard, natural gas pipeline, water lines, an access road and other associated facilities.

Project description

The project would be a "merchant plant" meaning it would not be owned by a utility nor by a utility affiliate selling power to its utility, nor is it supported by a long-term power purchase agreement with a utility. Caithness would instead sell power on a short- and mid-term basis to customers and on-the-spot market. Power purchases by customers would be voluntary and all economic costs would be borne by Caithness.

The project would consist of two phases. The first phase would feature a 500-megawatt (MW) natural gas-fired, combined cycle powerplant and on-site supporting infrastructure, including an administration building, warehouse storage, water treatment and storage facilities, cooling towers, water storage/evaporation ponds, gas conditioning equipment, and a new access road; a 500-kV switchyard with electrical equipment to accommodate an interconnection with the Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV Transmission Line; a 16-inch high-pressure natural gas pipeline between the generating facility and at least one natural gas supply line; and water supply wells and pipeline system. The second phase would consist of an additional 220-MW combined-cycle powerplant adjacent to the phase 1 powerplant.

The generating facility and infrastructure would be built on private property in Section 5, Township 15 North, Range 12 West, about 4 miles southeast of Wikieup, and about 2 miles east of U.S. Highway 93 crossing the Big Sandy River. The water supply wells would provide potable and cooling water. The project's water requirements would be approximately 3,200 acre-feet annually. A buried natural gas pipeline would bring high-pressure gas to the generating facility to fuel the gas-fired turbines from at least one natural gas transmission pipeline about 36 miles north of the powerplant site. It would be constructed parallel, within and/or adjacent to U.S. Highway 93 and Mohave County roads and utility easements. The pipeline would cross private and public lands administered by the BLM and the Arizona State Land Department.

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Decisions to be made

Caithness plans to construct an electric generating facility and to interconnect this facility with the existing Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kilovolt Transmission Line near Wikieup. Western is a participant/co-owner in the Mead-Phoenix Project. This transmission line runs between Mead, Nev., and Phoenix, Ariz., and currently has capacity available to transmit power from the proposed Big Sandy Project. The U.S. Department of Energy has an open transmission access policy and Western has an Open Access Transmission Tariff. Western will use the analysis of impacts, along with other factors, to determine whether to approve its participation in the project.

The BLM will decide whether to issue a right-of-way grant for the proposed natural gas supply pipeline, the permanent access road, and water pipeline across lands managed by the BLM.

The Arizona Department of Transportation will decide whether to allow joint use of its proposed right-of-way for the new US Highway 93 widening project to include the proposed natural gas supply pipeline. This would include any access roads needed to construct and maintain the pipeline.

The Mohave County Board of Supervisors will decide whether to re-zone a 120-acre parcel of private property for the generating facility. This decision is currently in progress, and has been acted upon by the Mohave County Planning and Zoning Commission. One of the stipulations in the staff recommendations, call for the Supervisors to "condition" the permit on the completion of the Federal environmental studies.

The Arizona Corporation Commission will deem the generating facility site suitable or not suitable as far as the use of private property is concerned in the state of Arizona. Other environmental permits may be required from various Arizona state offices, such as Arizona Department of Environmental Quality aquifer projection and air emissions permits.



Environmental studies

BLM and Western will be joint-lead agencies for the EIS. The EIS will be prepared following the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA implementing regulations (40 CFR Part 1500-1508). BLM and Western will carefully examine public health and safety, environmental impacts and engineering aspects of the proposed project. Initial public and agency input have identified the following issues as potential areas for study:

- Water resources, particularly groundwater (levels and long-term availability)
- Air quality and visibility
- ◆ Socioeconomics, both positive and negative effects on the Wikieup area
- Cultural resources, particularly the Carrow Stephens ranch site
- ♦ Biological resources, particularly threatened, endangered and other sensitive species
- Visual resources, particularly views from U.S. Highway 93
- Noise in the vicinity of the proposed generating facility
- Future land use in Mohave County

The scoping process will include notifying the general public and Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies of the proposed action. The purpose of scoping is to identify public and agency issues and alternatives to be considered in the EIS.

Even though other permitting actions will take place, the EIS will include analysis of effects from construction and operation of all components of the project. BLM and Western will cooperate with state and local agencies and tribes to the fullest extent possible to reduce duplication between NEPA and comparable state, local and tribal requirements and ensure consistent decision making. The ADOT and Mohave County Planning and Zoning Commission are cooperating agencies on the EIS.



Public participation

Western and the BLM invite interested people and organizations to take part in identifying issues and to comment on the draft and final EIS. It will include public information/scoping meetings; coordination and involvement with appropriate Federal, state, local and tribal government agencies; public review and hearings on the published draft EIS; a published final EIS; a 30-day waiting period; and publication of independent BLM and Western Records of Decision.

A public information and scoping meeting will be held on May 3, 2000, at 7 p.m., at the Owens Whitney School, 14109 Chicken Springs Road, Wikieup. The scoping meeting will be preceded by an informal open house beginning at 6 p.m. Scoping comments will be accepted until June 2, 2000. Preparation of the EIS will then begin. Comments on the proposed project will be accepted throughout the NEPA process.

Informational materials on the EIS process will be distributed to interested individuals and organizations and will highlight opportunities for public involvement.



Project contact

Your input is an integral part of the Big Sandy Project. Please direct project-related questions to:

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Comments should be provided by returning the enclosed response sheet, or writing Mr. Holt.

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The licensing and permitting for the project is expected to be completed in March 2001 when construction of the first phase would begin. Commercial operation is scheduled to begin in August 2002. The second phase is planned to be completed in December 2003.

Project schedule EIS milestones for the Big Sandy Project and their tentative dates are: Public Scoping Period April - May 2000 Draft EIS Public review September - October 2000 Draft EIS Public hearing October 2000 Distribute Final EIS January 2001 Records of Decision February 2001

Visit www.wapa.gov to get ongoing information about the Big Sandy Project.

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